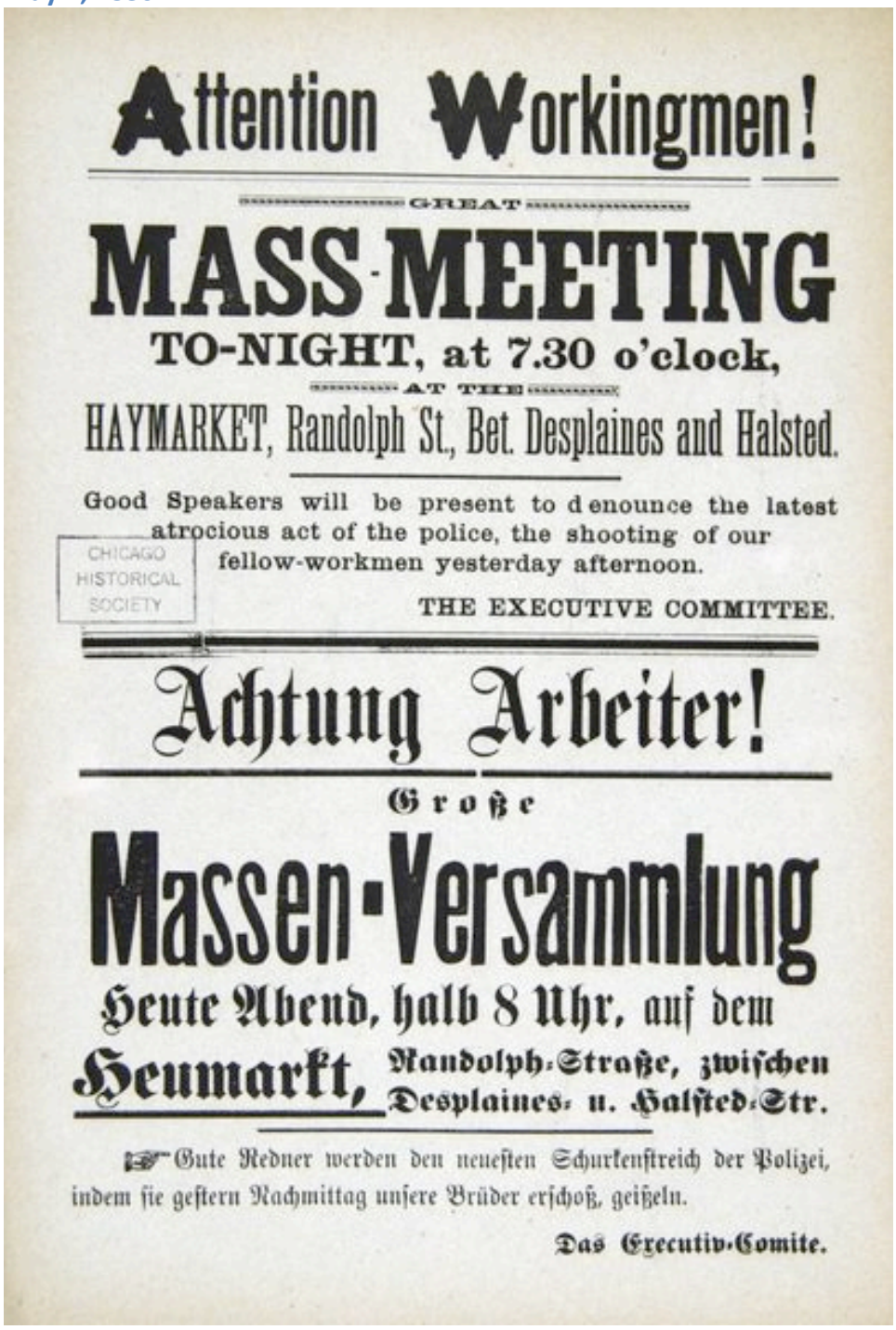
The Labor Movement and the Haymarket Affair

Nineteenth-century employers often expected workers to spend 12 to 14 hours a day, six days a week on the job. In the 1880s, workers' organizations, led by the Knights of Labor, joined with political radicals and reformers to organize a national effort to demand an eight-hour workday. During the first week of May 1886, 35,000 Chicago workers walked off of their jobs in massive strikes to protest their lengthy work weeks. Some of these strikes involved violent skirmishes with the police. At least two strikers were killed on May 3. In response, the next evening, roughly 1,500 people gathered at the West Randolph Street Haymarket, a market on the edge of the city where people bought hay for their horses. Although the May 4 rally featured fiery speeches from political radicals and labor leaders, it was a peaceful gathering. As the rally drew to a close, hundreds of policemen moved in to disperse the crowd. Someone threw a bomb at the police brigade, killing one officer instantly. The police responded with a barrage of bullets. An unknown number of demonstrators were killed or wounded. Sixty police officers were injured and eight eventually died. Politicians and the press blamed radicals for the violence. Although there was no evidence linking specific people to the bomb, eight men were convicted of murder on the basis of their political writings and speeches. Four men were executed; one committed suicide. The trial was later considered grossly unjust and, in 1893, the Illinois governor granted absolute pardon to the three, remaining imprisoned defendants. The labor organizations, however, were severely damaged. The documents that follow include the Knights of Labor's statement of principles, a broadside advertising the Haymarket rally, and the May 15, 1886, cover of Harper's Weekly, a national political magazine.

“Attention Workingmen! Great Mass Meeting Tonight at 7:30 O'clock at the Haymarket”

May 4, 1886.



Attention Workingmen!

GREAT

MASS-MEETING

TO-NIGHT, at 7.30 o'clock,

AT THE

HAYMARKET, Randolph St., Bet. Desplaines and Halsted.

Good Speakers will be present to denounce the latest atrocious act of the police, the shooting of our fellow-workmen yesterday afternoon.

CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

Achtung Arbeiter!

Große

Massen-Versammlung

Heute Abend, halb 8 Uhr, auf dem

Heumarkt, Randolph-Straße, zwischen Desplaines- u. Halsted-Str.

☞ Gute Redner werden den neuesten Schurkenstreich der Polizei, indem sie gestern Nachmittag unsere Brüder erschoß, geißeln.

Das Executiv-Comite.

A broadside advertising the May 4, 1886, rally at the Chicago Haymarket that would become the scene of violent clashes between police and demonstrators.

“Too Heavy a Load for the Trades-Unions”

Thomas Nast. From *Harper's Weekly*, May 15, 1886.

This cover story from Harper’s Weekly shows a worker carrying the bloated weight of a union “agitator.”

The Pullman Strike

In 1867 George Pullman founded the Pullman Palace Car Company to manufacture passenger coach railroad cars and, by the end of the century, he had monopolized the industry. Company headquarters moved to the outskirts of Chicago in 1880, where Pullman built a large factory and a company town with his name. By the 1890s, 6,000 of his 14,000 nationwide employees were based in Pullman, Illinois. Pullman was initially hailed as a forward-thinking industrialist, who provided a high quality of life for his workers. But, when the national economy took a downturn in 1893, the company laid off thousands of employees and cut wages. Pullman would not negotiate with the workers, who then went on strike in May 1894. The American Railway Union (ARU) threw its support behind the Pullman strikers by initiating a national boycott of the Pullman Company. ARU members refused to work on any train carrying a Pullman car, crippling railway traffic across the country. The federal government, under President Grover Cleveland, intervened in the crisis, first, by requesting a court injunction forbidding the boycott and, then, by sending soldiers to Chicago and elsewhere to enforce the injunction. The ARU's leader, Eugene V. Debs, was arrested and imprisoned for promoting the boycott. By mid-July, both the strike and the union had been broken, but not without considerable violence. Pullman himself came under widespread criticism for underpaying his workers and refusing to negotiate. The documents that follow include representations of and responses to Pullman, Debs, and the strikers.

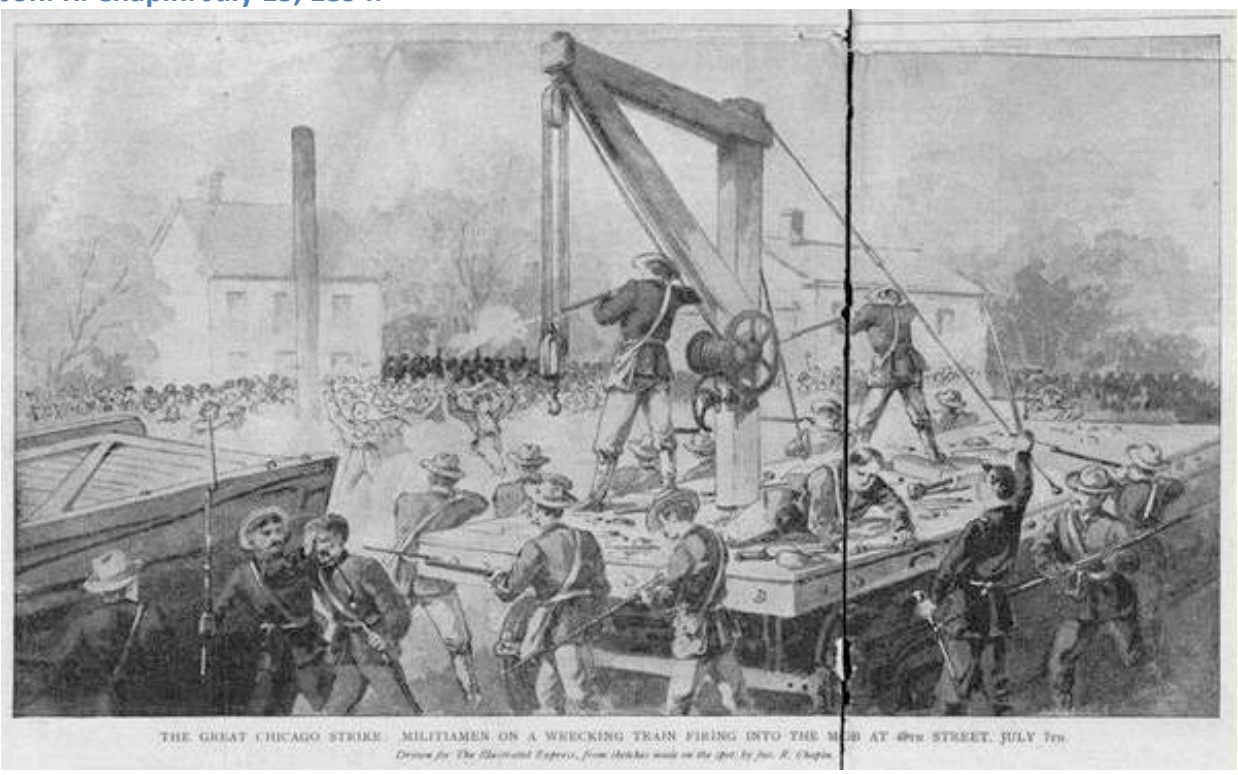
"Burning of Six Hundred Freight-Cars on the Panhandle Railroad, South of Fiftieth Street, on the Evening of July 6th"

G. A. Coffin, Charles Mente. From *Harper's Weekly*, July 21, 1894.

This image depicts the destruction of Pullman cars in response to industrialist, George Pullman, laying off workers and slashing wages during an economic downturn.

“The Great Chicago Strike: Militiamen on a Wrecking Train Firing into the Mob at 49th Street”

Jon. R. Chapin. July 15, 1894.



This image depicts militiamen firing into a crowd of striking Pullman factory workers during the Pullman Strike.

“King Debs”

W. A. Rogers. From *Harper's Weekly*, July 14, 1894.

This image, a response to the Pullman Strike, depicts labor leader Eugene V. Debs perched atop a railroad bridge.

“Chicago Herald Illustration”

November 4, 1895.

This cartoon is a response to industrialist, George Pullman, laying off workers and slashing wages during an economic downturn.